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**State Officials Stress the Importance of Following Safe Boating Guidelines**

*Fourth of July Holiday Brings An Increase in Boating and Recreational Traffic to Bay State Waters. Officers Remind Boaters and Passengers to Wear Lifejackets At All Times*

BOSTON – With summer already in full force and the Fourth of July weekend just around the corner, Massachusetts Environmental Police officers are reminding Massachusetts residents of simple boating safety guidelines, including the importance of wearing lifejackets.

“Boating is recreational and meant to be fun, but it can also be risky if precautionary measures are not taken,” said Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) Captain George Agganis. “It’s our job to remind the public of those simple tips. We encourage all boaters to ‘Boat Smart from the Start.’”

Among those smart tips is to always wear a life jacket.

“When you’re having fun on the Commonwealth’s waterways, you want to make sure not to hurt yourself or others,” said Secretary Ian Bowles, an avid boater himself. “It’s better to be safe than sorry. It only takes a moment to take a few precautions.”

In addition to wearing life jackets, officials urge boaters to take a boating safety course, stay sober while boating, and make sure their boats are reliable and in good repair.

According to MEP Director James Hanlon, there were nine fatalities from boating accidents in Massachusetts in 2006 and seven fatalities in 2007. Most were drownings and none of the victims were wearing life jackets. This season, there’s been one boating

fatality. Nationally, hundreds of people drown in boating-related accidents each year, and eight out of every 10 victims weren't wearing life jackets at their time of death.

"Wearing a life jacket is the most important factor between life and death in many boating accidents," said Hanlon.

In Massachusetts, the past decade has seen over 100 boating fatalities – a one-third reduction from the previous ten-year period. Hanlon attributes the improvement to increased boater education and marine enforcement as well as safer vessels.

Massachusetts law requires children under 12 years of age, all jet-ski riders and water-skiers to wear approved life jackets. The Commonwealth's boating laws also prohibit anyone under age 12 from operating a motorboat unless accompanied and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older. Youths aged 12 through 15 must complete an approved basic boating course before operating a motorboat without adult supervision. Operating any vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs is prohibited.

The Environmental Police encourages boaters of all ages to take a safe boating course. For a schedule of state-run boating courses, as well as links to state and nationally approved course providers visit [www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dle/dlecours.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dle/dlecours.htm).

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